

THE DEATH OF MURDO¹

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(From *The Pictorial Review*)

“OH, Murdo, grandson of the mighty chief Lupu, but father of none worthy of thy blood. I shall tell of thy death to the ‘other ones’ so that they might know how to die themselves. I have already told them of thy great wisdom; that wisdom which was far greater than that of the snake, yet had none of its poison; and thy great wing-strength, more powerful than that of the eagle, on which thou hast lifted thine own soul above the dirt and the dust of the valley, but never soiled with the blood of prey.

“Murdo, grandson of Lupu, the Wolf. (Eagle and Snake. Man. Of all who have seen thee die I am the only one to know the truth. The tribe is scattered to the four winds. ‘Lilith’ has done her dreadful work. Murdo, my teacher, my chief, thou who hast been more than father or brother to me, forgive me if I do not tell the story as thou, incomparable one, wouldst have had me tell it.”

I had been away from the camp for over a year. Civilization and father and mother had claimed me; but hardly had the green shown itself from underneath the snow and I rejoined Murdo’s tribe again. An old Tzigany had told me that Murdo was mortally ill and that the whole tribe was stranded near the Black Sea. The morning after I reached Konstanz, through marshes and mire, found me by Murdo’s cot. The great chief had grown considerably older. The knife-wound he had received from Yorga, the fiddler, the previous fall, had not healed, and the concotions and incantations of Miora had not successfully replaced a needed physician.

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"It is well thou art here," Murdo greeted me. "I have called thee with my soul. It is too soon for me to die. Though I am advanced in years, my tribe still needs me. Nicolai, son of my own blood, is no man to be chief of a tribe. He dreams away on his violin. Oh! that a pigeon should be born in an eagle's nest! The starost of the village has told me many a time to go to one of your doctors. But I have believed and still do believe that illness and recovery from it is Fate; with which neither doctor nor witch can interfere. Yet your people, who have made wagons go without horses, a bridge span the Danube, who can talk with one another across distances without the aid of witches—by stretching wires that the sparrows stand upon—perhaps you do know something about diseases which we neither believe nor understand. So do take me to one of your doctors and talk to him and tell him I must yet live a short while. It is not health I want, but life. Life until I choose a chief in whom my people shall believe. Their trust in me is so great—too great—they will never be satisfied with another man unless it be proved he is as good or better than I."

I looked at Murdo's wound and marveled that he was still alive. Only his great powers of resistance had enabled him to live that long. I wondered that he had not died long before of blood-poisoning! He was emaciated beyond belief. His long arms were so thin that it looked as though his bones had been shaved down to spindles. The veins of his neck and around his temples showed like blue cords from which the hemp had been worn and loosened. The cheek-bones of his dark-grained face edged against the parched skin and gave him a haunted aspect. Even his voice, that great and haughty drum-voice, though still big and commanding, had lost the firmness of its tissue. It rasped like drumsticks upon the loosened skin of a bass drum.

The tribe, nervous and restless, wandered hither and thither in narrow circles, like lost children, uncertain and afraid, forming little groups behind the trees in the forest, or under distant tents, discussing in subdued voices every detail, bickering, quarreling, doing their best to keep dis-

agreeable things away from the ears and eyes of their chief. The horses and the dogs looked worn and forlorn, sick and sorely in need of a master. For the horse of the Gipsy and the dog of the Gipsy are happy when their master is happy, and sad when their master is sad, and grow restless and nervous when sojourning too long in the same place.

"But why are you all so sad?" I asked Lica, the son of Miora, the witch, who had somehow assumed some sort of command during the chief's illness.

"How can we be happy," he replied, "when we no longer hear the song of the hammer upon the anvil, when the smith dares not blow his bellows lest he disturb Murdo from his sleep? When we have looked upon the same hill so long the pegs of our tents are rotting in the ground? Look! Our horses have lost half their hoof-bones. It is an age since they have been shod. Look! We have muzzled our dogs, and when our goats bleat in the morning, our women rush out with knife in hand to cut out their tongues. Because our chief battles with death we have become like old women; fussy and afraid of noise."

That very afternoon, having bedded Murdo as comfortably as possible in the wagon, I started on my journey with him to the town of Braila on the Danube. The trip lasted several days.

"Now tell me what thou hast learned while away from my camp," Murdo turned upon me suddenly the night of our first stopover at an inn kept by a Greek.

I was certain the doctor would have to operate and cleanse the wound where Yorga's knife had struck. Fearing Murdo might oppose such operation, I began to explain the cause of infections and the means employed for staying them, and the existence of microbes in the human body. Murdo listened very attentively as though I were telling him some interesting story, but I could see that he did not believe what I was telling him. After a long pause he said to me:

"It is a well-knit tale thou hast put forward. But thou, who hast argued against the existence of spirits and goblins in the air, how is it thou wantest me to believe in your

tale of the existence of worms which I do not see. Surely our fairy-tales are nicer than yours!"

He called me over to his cot the following night and asked me to continue my "fairy-tale."

"But since you do not believe, Murdo—" I objected.

"And hast thou ever believed our fairy-tales? Yet thou hast insisted we tell them to you!"

I recalled to him a telescope we had once seen together and explained how by increasing the number and the power of these glasses one could see things placed at enormous distances. He believed that. Then I told him how with the aid of such powerful glasses very small things could be magnified and how upon increasing the power of these glasses things too small to be seen with the naked eye could be made visible.

"I should love to see with my own eyes through those glasses those invisible little goblins of which you speak so convincingly," he answered sarcastically.

"Thou shalt see," I assured him.

"Truly," Murdo rejoined, "thou art a good story-teller. Thou even believest what thou tellest. Go off to sleep now. Perhaps I shall dream of what thou hast told me—of those powerful glasses through which thou hast magnified thy story!"

I knew I had won my point. I knew I had won because the doctor to whom I was taking Murdo, an old friend of the family, possessed a microscope.

No sooner had the doctor seen the old man's wound than he called in another physician. Without asking any questions, they put Murdo under ether, and before long they had opened and cleansed the wound. When Murdo awoke he found himself solidly strapped to the bed. I had urged that method upon the doctor, for I feared what Murdo might do upon his awakening from ether. But he was very mild and submissive. He asked me to sit near him. A few days later Murdo, who for the first time in many moons had slept peacefully, was completely restored. The doctor had allowed him the use of a room in his own household. Another few days and Murdo was ready to return to his camp.

"I hate to make thee feel guilty," Murdo said when we were ready to leave. "If what thou hast told me on the road hither was but a fairy-tale, well and good. If, however, it is a true tale, I shall willingly give a year of my life to see it proved."

Within five minutes the microscope was brought to light, and the doctor himself put underneath the lens a few pieces of glass upon which he had made different smears. He allowed Murdo to look at the whirling mass of squirming matter. Murdo looked for a full hour. Having fully satisfied his curiosity, he walked out of the room and asked me to leave him by himself.

The following day we were upon our homeward journey. Murdo was driving. I was sitting near him. The whole day long he remained silent.

"Well?" I inquired that evening. "Art thou satisfied about the existence of *these* goblins?" He turned two very sad eyes upon me; then replied:

"I never knew there were things alive and yet too small to kill. Living things that could destroy a man, but whose smallness saved them from our wrath! I have been thinking of them the whole day long. In size those little worms are about in the same relation to the ant as the ant to us. A drop of water, which they in their infinitesimality cannot see, is enough to drown millions of them. A little child passes over an ant-hill and under its little sole destroys the work of a whole season of millions of them. The ants do not understand what has crushed them. They only feel its power. They are too small to see the child from sole to head as a whole being. They only feel its strength. You blow your softest breath, and it is like a devastating hurricane.

"If we stand in the same relation to some other bigger being as those little worms stand to the ant and the ant to ourselves, when one of those huge beings moves its hand, a great storm arises, a tempest. A drop of sweat falls from his brow, and our fields are inundated; it forms a lake, a river upon which sail large ships. He looks at us, at all of us, because we too are too small to be seen singly and—we have light! We are warm! Perhaps the sun is one

of his eyes. Who knows upon what other little thing his other eye may rest? A speck of dust—our hills, our mountains. Think of what all our wisdom means, what our time and space are to him, the earth and the oceans and the waters all perhaps so small that he, too, needs some powerful glass to see us! And there may yet be still other beings standing in the same relation to him as he to us——”

When Murdo was in one of his reflective moods he was better left undisturbed. But the following day he continued the conversation.

“And if this be so—and I am almost certain it is so—then we are so small that one’s life is not worthy of the slightest consideration. It is the good of the whole tribe one must think of; and if I, Murdo, will soon be too old to rule—for man should rule only when he is able to enforce his commands—should I not beforehand choose a man fit to follow me? What matters it which ant is alive just so that the ant-hill lives? So I shall choose a chief in my own manner. One in whom they shall have absolute confidence; for the wisdom and the power of a ruler are in the belief of his people. And I shall choose the best one in my own manner. And I shall choose him while I am yet able to do so, before old age has dimmed my mind and while I am yet ruler. But one thing I want of thee. Never a word to the others of what thou hast told me! Never a word of what we have seen through those glasses! Never speak of our stay at your doctor’s! A witch has cured me! And never question when I ask thee to do something! Just do it!”

Another day and we were in camp. Seeing him restored, the happiness of the Gypsies broke all bounds. Wine began to flow freely. The musicians brought out their fiddles again, and song and dance continued through days and nights. The smith set up his anvil and was singing loudly to the accompaniment of the hammer while fashioning shoes out of red-hot iron. Of all music, the clang of the hammer, alternating from the hard steel of the anvil to the soft hot iron, pleased the Gypsies most. When the smith and his helper hammered together, they composed and improvised melodies and accompaniments for the hammer.

The lustrous, black hair of the maidens was plaited with early violets and evergreens, in thankfulness to the Great Spirit who had restored Murdo to life. Fresh holes were bored in the lobes of the men's ears and new rings of white gold were inserted. In their frenzy, even the little boys came and offered their lobes to be pierced. Little cries of pain were mixed with great cries of joy. At last they could again be noisy. They could allow the horses to neigh, the dogs to bark, and the goats to bleat at will. They could shout, they could quarrel, they could fight. There was no need of hushing one another. No need of soul-torturing restraint. If one were hurt, he could cry aloud. They could be Gypsies again!

Postponed weddings were celebrated. Oh, since the wine was flowing so freely and the musicians were playing, since the women were at their best and the men at their happiest, let it be; for the good of future generations. Let Tanase marry Nitza and Andrea marry Tina; so they could remember and say later on they married the spring Murdo was restored to life. Great joys should be remembered through great joys.

At the camp-fire one night, Lica, the son of Miora, who was believed to have great witch-power, asked Murdo, "What has restored thee to health? Some great 'gagiu' in high silk hat and long black frock? Or who else?"

"No!" answered Murdo. "A witch who knew more incantations than I have ever heard. Who brought down goblins from the air so near to me I could see them. Who brought them down in millions and had them dance before me. And by payment of much gold I have not only been restored to health, but obtained from her immunity. No harm can befall me—except from a knife. And immunity of danger even from that source could have been assured, had I been willing to pay what she asked, and stay there a longer time. But for what I paid she has given me immunity against many things. Look!"

And as he said that, Murdo rose and handed me his pistol. "Here I stand." Then turning to me, he added, "Stand six feet away. Now. Raise your arm and aim. Here!" he commanded, exposing his chest.

Murdo's words, followed by his immediate action, took all the men by surprise. "What did he say? What did he ask that boy to do?"

I, standing there, facing Murdo, trembling, held under the spell of Murdo's eyes, which were immeasurably dilated with his own excitement, only remembered his words, "Don't question. Do what I tell thee."

"Pull the trigger!" he ordered. And I did as he told me. There was a loud report. I fell exhausted with my own emotions. Yet Murdo remained standing and laughing.

"That is what the witch I met did for me! Until some man meets a more powerful one, I shall be immune. That's what makes a great chief. Immunity from disease and murderous weapons."

When I recovered I saw that the Gypsies no longer crowded their chief. Awe kept them open-mouthed at a distance. Only Miora, the old witch, allowed a little cynical smile to play around her lips as she looked at Murdo and her son. I was fully aware that Murdo had noticed that, and was also aware that Miora's disbelief in the power of that great witch about whom Murdo had spoken was not displeasing to the chief.

The following day Murdo, who recuperated more rapidly than I thought possible, was up and about his work. I had never before seen him as quarrelsome. He found fault with everything. The horses had been neglected too much. The dogs were too lean. The canvas of the wagons had not been kept in order. The goats were dry. Murdo, who had never paid any attention to the work of the women in the camp, now found fault with it and censored the women for their lack of order. When Sunday came he quarreled with the younger women for having too many jewels; too many dresses, he said, had been wheedled out of their men, who had become as soft as old women. Some of the children whom he inspected closely had sores and boils which had broken out among them while Murdo was ill. And then he accused Miora of knowing as little of incantations and witchery as the cat in the tree.

While Murdo was talking to Miora, Lica came nearer the chief. Murdo sailed savagely right into him, telling

him that he was the worthy son of his mother, that he was sloppy, that his whip was not strong enough to hurt a chicken, that his boots were as dirty as those of a beggar, and that while he had carefully waxed his mustache he had not washed his face.

"Has all the water dried up?" Murdo asked sarcastically, "or are you waiting for your mother to wash your face clean with her tongue, as a mother cat her kitten?"

The big, taut frame of Lica shook upon hearing his chief's words. He loved his mother passionately and believed implicitly in her supernatural powers. That Murdo should have singled him out, him and his mother, for such unjust reproaches, when he had done his best to keep some order when Murdo had been ill, pained the big Gypsy.

"If thou hast lost entire belief in the power of my mother's witchcraft," Lica answered, "why not bring here the one thou hast newly met to replace her? At any rate, I thought she had only coarsened thy hide, but I see I was mistaken——"

I could hardly believe my ears. What man dared use such language to Murdo and hope still to live?

By that time a number of men and women of the camp surrounded the two.

"Lost my belief!" Murdo exclaimed, laughing. "I never had any!"

"Never had any!" Lica echoed, and looked around at the other men. His mother's face twitched, her body became contorted. She gave one long hiss, like a snake, and hobbled away on her stick.

"Never had any! What about the time she had darkened the sun? When she had sailed away on a broomstick in open daylight?" many of the other Gypsies repeated. They put as much space between themselves and their chief as they could. It was blasphemy. Murdo was calling down the wrath of the evil one upon himself and the camp. And if Miora were no witch at all, why had he not told them before? Was it possible they had lived so many years without protection from evil spirits? From "Ciuma," the mother of the forest! X

When they had all gone Murdo said to me, "Keep

as near my tent as possible, for, though thou hast not insulted them, their anger may turn upon thee." I sat in front of the tent watching the men busying themselves feverishly each at his work. I could hear them muttering as they worked. I could see them grouping themselves and talking in subdued voices as they shot out glances from underneath their lashes toward where Murdo was sitting. Only Lica and Miora were not to be seen. Curiously enough, Murdo's face, which had been so choleric only a while ago, had suddenly turned a glossy white. A certain beatitude seemed to be enveloping him. His eyes were very wide open and an unearthly smile played about his lips. It was the same smile that played when he confused an adversary in a discussion, when he was tremendously satisfied with himself.

"One can never rule too well," he said to me after a while. "If a ruler is kind, men think him a weakling. So he is a bad ruler. If a ruler is severe, his men think him a tyrant. So he is a bad ruler. One should rule well according to his own lights. A kind ruler should be kind and a severe one severe."

That night Murdo remained awake. He came over several times to my tent. He said he could not sleep; but I knew he was watching over me, fearing something might happen.

I had attempted several times to make conversation with the men and the women of the tribe, but they avoided me and sent me unceremoniously about my work. Only Miora had come nearer, and, passing her bony hands through my hair, she asked, "Were you with Murdo when he visited that witch?"

"No," I replied. "He was alone. I never saw the witch."

Miora looked into my eyes to see if I had told the truth. Satisfied, she hobbled away to the tent she occupied with her son.

In two days Murdo had worked up the men and women of his tribe to such an extent that they were in almost open revolt. He had used the whip mercilessly. He had insulted and beaten them. He had taken away the jewels

from the women, broken the cask of wine, smashed the jugs of whiskey, and fed to the dogs the quarters of dried lamb which hung inside the tents. At the smithy he had elbowed away the smith to show him how shoes ought to be made and put on. He accused the wheelwright of putting the iron rims upon his wheels when too cold. It made the spokes become loose too soon and ruined the carriages. He tore the big needle from the hands of the harness-maker and showed him how stitches should be made in thick leather. He even kicked the boys currying the horses; told them that their hands were made of cotton and their feet of putty and that they were not worthy of attending to horses.

I could not understand the reason back of Murdo's action. I was certain that there was a motive and a good one, because he was not at all as grouchy when alone in his tent or talking to me. On the contrary, he seemed satisfied with his own attitude toward his men, and talked glibly and banteringly of what he might yet do to them.

Miora had evidently spread the news that I had had nothing to do with the chief's finding of a new witch. For the men and women in the tribe renewed old friendships with me. Murdo found me talking to one of the young women. He called me aside.

"She is married now," he told me. "So you had better keep at a distance from her."

"But I have talked to her before, Murdo, and neither thou nor her husband ever objected!"

"No, he has not objected; only he is no longer your friend. It is the way with women. They want every man who comes near them to forswear all his men friends. A woman hates less and fears less the mistress of her husband than she hates and fears his men friends. It is the reason she separates her man from his friends. All means are fair—jealousy as well as others. And another thing I will tell thee. Women do not want you to tell them the truth. They want men to lie to them. They urge them on, and the more they know that he lies the more satisfied they are, the more they like him. For she knows that it is because of her that he lies, that he has done what is most

contrary to his own nature. For man needs never lie to a woman if she did not compel him to do so. It is the lies a man tells a woman that chains him to her more than his love. Each lie is a link forged to the chain. And another thing I will tell thee. It is well it is so. Two things a woman has to hold a man near her when he no longer wants her—her tears and her children. It is well she has a third one—his lies.

“And still another thing I will tell thee—this time about high mountains. The higher the peak the deeper the root. And about large wheels moving slowly but covering great distances. But all this thou wilt in time know, coming to the knowledge in a different way. Oh, you who have discovered how to see things too small to kill, yet not learned how to live! Oh, you with your books and solidly walled houses, with your customs and your manners, with your kings and your doctors! You neither understand how to live nor know how to die. And though you have knowledge, you have no wisdom. You are like overfull barrels. You cannot flow. You ooze. Your brains are clogged; stuffed, leaving you no room for thought.”

Sunday. The inn at the market-place. The peasants of the neighborhood are there to buy horses. The plowing done, they are soon to begin to harrow. They use horses for that work. Murdo's men are out with their brown little ponies, proving their speed, endurance, and pulling strength. Two fiddlers on chairs upon a table are scraping furiously away with their bows. A few of the youngsters are already dancing, though it is far from midday. The village tippler, chronically drunk, stands with his full, white-trousered legs wide apart, holding an enormous earthen pitcher in his outstretched hand, and offers drink to all passers-by. “Drink, for spring is here!”

The girls stand in little groups, like field-flowers, and talk among themselves, nod approval or bend in laughter, looking from between long and lowered eyelashes in the direction from which the young men arrive on their way to the inn. They know one another so intimately that they remark the slightest change of detail in apparel.

“Oh, look, Stan has put a new ribbon on his hat!”

"Oh, did you ever know Dan had a shirt with red-embroidered sleeves?"

"No, I know of one embroidered with yellow and another with black. This one with red is a new one."

"Had his mother bought any red wool?"

"No, but Fanutza did."

"Then it must be Fanutza! And I had always thought he was to marry Viora!"

And among the young men they talked of the girls.

"Angelica has added a new silver piece to her necklace. It looks a bit too long; dangles too low."

"Her father resoled his boots the other day and quarreled with the cobbler."

"The innkeeper broke a new pitcher last week. Fell on the stairs coming from the cellar and broke the pitcher."

"Which one?"

"The one with blue flowers on a yellow background."

"Innkeepers are so clumsy!"

"Clumsy and rich."

"Nae, the musician, snapped three strings in one month. It is a good omen. Never let the Gypsy use the same strings at two weddings. Either you or your wife will be unfaithful within the year."

Every little thing is noticed. Every little thing is discussed, is food for thought and talk. And if one bought a horse the whole village is ready to give him advice. And even after the man and horse are buried, the story of how he began the bargain, the first price asked, the price offered, every word, every gesture and word of the Gypsy and the buyer are repeated for years and years; standing near the fences in the summer nights or sitting at the fireside in the winter.

"Do you remember when George bought his horse? It was the year Stan married and Maren's bitch gave him a litter of six black little puppies."

The chief topic of that Sunday, however, was Murdo's marvelous recovery and the tale he had told of being immunized from bullets and disease by a great witch he had met somewhere along the shores of the Danube.

When Murdo appeared at the inn he was surrounded by

older peasants who plied him with questions. The younger ones kept respectfully aside.

"But really," said one who had great faith in Miora's great powers, "you will not tell me, Murdo, that the one you recently met can do what Miora is able to do? That she can ride upon a broomstick through the air as well as Miora, or stay the pest as Miora has done? Don't we know how many times Miora has saved this whole world from destruction with her incantations! And what the other one can do, Miora can and better. I am sure of that."

Murdo listened smilingly, allowing his interlocutor to wax warmer and warmer on the subject of Miora and attracting more and more people around him.

When the crowd was big enough Murdo turned around and said, "There is Miora and there is her son, Lica. He is the truest shot of all my men. He is a good man. And were he not to believe as much in his mother's power as he does, he would be still a better man. Here is a test. I shall go away for two days to my witch. While I am away let Miora immunize her son against pistol-shots. Then we will stand six feet apart with raised arms and cocked pistols. Who remains standing is chief."

Murdo's proposition was received with astonishment and awe by his listeners. Something worth while remembering had already happened. A legend was in the making. A great chief, Murdo!

I shall never forget the face of Miora after Murdo had spoken. The locks of her lower jaw seemed to have slipped out of their hinges. She was incapable of articulating a word. The gurgling, moaning cry she let out was so unearthly; it sounded more like the faint howl of packs of distant wolves than that of a human being. In her anxiety to protect with her own body the stature of her son, she stretched herself so high, it seemed her humped back was flattening out. Big as he was, Lica seemed a small baby near that knotted, bony, hardened frame of his old mother.

Murdo vanished from the place as though the earth had swallowed him. As everybody was looking for him and he was not to be found, the tale quickly spread that he had

ridden away on the proverbial broomstick of the witches. Children playing in front of the inn pointed to a lone, wild duck high up in the air. They assured their elders that it was Murdo; that they had seen him rise. Before night-fall the miracle was believed. Even Miora believed it.

No horse-trading was done that day. When night came everybody felt that the thing had resolved itself into a fight of witches. That the contest was to be fought between Miora and that other witch who had cured Murdo. And that the price was to be the chieftainship of the tribe.

How could it be otherwise? If Murdo's witch knew more powerful incantations, more effective ones than Miora's, then Miora was a useless member of the tribe; then both she and her son Lica should have to go elsewhere. But if Murdo, who had courted and obtained the disapproval and hatred of Miora, if Murdo's witch was not all he pretended her to be, then he could not remain the chief of the tribe. For a man had to be protected against evil and had to be able to recur to witchery if he were to rule effectively a tribe of Gypsies. What if a disease befell the cattle? What if a disease befell the people? And how frequently those two afflictions came together! How could a man be without the protection of a witch? And when that man was a ruler he had to be immune from many evils and had to be able to consult with the supernatural.

It was strange to see how the absence of Murdo affected his tribe. During the following two days life became an unbearable burden to me. Miora and her son kept to their tent. The rest of the tribe, men, women and children, huddled pell-mell, cried, yelled, scratching, pushing, at times moving like a flabby, will-less mass of soft flesh, hither and thither, without aim, without reason.

The soul-shattering experience made them remember old words and old curses. Customs and habits which had long ago fallen into disuse, fallen by the wayside at the Ganges River, on the Turkestan roads, rose to the surface again. The women formed a circle holding each other's braids and pulling hard, yelling and turning round and round. The men stripped and flogged one another. At one time during the night, when I had seen an altar built, I feared a return

to human sacrifice. But the fire was not lighted. An old Gypsy spoke and stayed whatever was about to take place. He urged them to keep their minds away. Not to commit themselves. For if Moira were stronger and they had committed themselves mentally to the other one, they were sure to be punished. So they danced rhythmless dances and sang tuneless songs, buried their nails in the flesh of their faces and their breasts, and howled with delight. In the end some one started to repeat incessantly two words, "Cirtra, vatra; cirtra, vatra; cirtra, vatra." Soon they were all repeating the same words, holding one another under the spell of their feverish, dilated eyes and the jerking, nervous movements of their limbs and shoulders.

The loud moaning of Miora rose above the din of the monotone, which soon became like an accompaniment to the wailing song. From time to time this unearthly cacophony was punctured with a dry and piercing report from Lica's pistol.

In their distraction the Gypsies had not noticed the appearance of Murdo in their midst. When they had noticed him they remained silent and surrounded him. Oh, they believed in him and his witch! He could see that in their eyes. Why had he thought it necessary to test them?

Murdo was in his bare feet and dressed only in a white shirt, held closely to the hips with a wide red sash.

"Call Lica," he ordered, "but let two men keep Miora in her tent."

Lica came out. He was not too sure on his feet. I could see Murdo remarked that. The old chief walked to where the young Gypsy was standing, measured six feet away from him, opened the shirt at his chest until the gray-haired surface was exposed, and said:

"Aim well, Lica, for I want no excuse afterward. It is known thou art the best shot of the tribe."

Miora howled her loudest. The others were awe-struck and silent.

"Now," and the old chief leveled his pistol. "When I say 'three.'"

Lica was pale, but he had regained his composure. It was evident both men were anxious to end the affair.

"One."

"Two."

"Three." Both men emptied their pistols; and Murdo fell flat on his back. The blood trickled.

"Murdo!" I cried, leaning over the dying man.

Lica was untouched, wondering, amazed at what had happened.

"In—my—left—hand—take it—" Murdo murmured softly.

"He—is—a good shot. They will believe in him. It's what—they need. A chief—in whom they believe—a great witch, Miora—greater than mine——"

From his left hand I took the lead of the bullet Murdo had fired at Lica!

He died to give them a chief they could believe greater than he was.

So they danced and made merry. And there was song and wine, and the women were again at their best and the men at their happiest.

"Oh, Murdo, grandson of the mighty chief Lupu, but father of none worthy of thy blood. I shall tell of thy death to the 'other ones' so that they might know how to die themselves. I have already told them of thy great wisdom; that wisdom which was far greater than that of the snake, yet had none of its poison; and thy great wing-strength, more powerful than that of the eagle, on which thou hast lifted thine own soul above the dirt and the dust of the valley, but never soiled with the blood of prey.

"Murdo, grandson of Lupu, the Wolf. Eagle and Snake. Man. Of all who have seen thee die I am the only one to know the truth. The tribe is scattered to the four winds. 'Lilith' has done her dreadful work. Murdo, my teacher, my chief, thou who hast been more than father or brother to me, forgive me if I have not told the story as thou, incomparable one, wouldst have had me tell it."